

# The Black Belt Book of Life – Topic #14

## The Road to Success is Paved with Failure

Within the heart emotions stir.  
Failure is not what we prefer;  
but yet, the victors all confer -  
*The Road To Success Is Paved With Failure.*

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*Success consists of going from failure to failure  
without loss of enthusiasm.*

*Success is not final, failure is not fatal:  
it is the courage to continue that counts.*  
Sir Winston Churchill

*Most people give up just when they're about to  
achieve success. They quit on the one yard line.  
They give up at the last minute of the game,  
one foot from a winning touchdown.*  
Ross Perot

**We live in a dual dimension.** There is positive; there is negative. There is day; there is night. There is high; there is low; masculine and feminine; hard and soft; hot and cold; on and off; up and down, war and peace and . . . success and failure.

All of the components of these pairs share opposite sides of the same energetic coin. We can't have one and escape the other. It's impossible. When we hold a coin in our hand, we hold both sides simultaneously. The key to managing opposites is to find the Golden Mean or balance point between the two sides and not to become imbalanced by focusing on one side to the exclusion of the other. The other is there, and as long as we're aware of it and work with it we can lead a meaningful and fulfilling life.

In the case of success and failure, each is part of the other as reflected in the Yin/Yang symbol of the Chinese Tao. In this ancient pictorial motif there exists a black dot in the white hemisphere and a white dot in the black hemisphere representing the truth of intrinsically connected opposites. Failure does not stand alone. Nor does success. They are two halves of the same whole.

Unfortunately, this concept is overlooked or not understood. Too often, failure is feared, subsequently fatally wounding the aspirant in search of success. In other words, some people quit because they think failure is something bad or to be ashamed of when in reality it is an integral part of the success process. To succeed, we have to expect failure so we can learn from our mistakes and ultimately succeed. It's just a process, and through it we come to the unambiguous and incontrovertible conclusion that *the road to success is paved with failure*.

So whose failure is the road to success paved with? It's paved with the failure of others and our own, mostly our own. In studying the lives of people who have failed and ultimately succeeded, by their experiences we learn what to do and what not to do. Their journeys can help us lay the pavestones for our own roads to success.

Abraham Lincoln was, arguably, the greatest president in United States history. The power, strength, wisdom and savvy this great soul expressed are immense. Read a little about his life. It is a beautiful example of how *the road to success is paved with failure*, each failure honing his spirit, creating more wisdom, making him stronger, giving him more resolve, more desire, more knowledge to build a legacy of failure and success that would be hard to match. Did he set out fail? Of course not. No one sets out to fail, but we all do. Lincoln certainly did. He failed . . . and failed . . . and failed and kept failing. He failed so much before he became the tremendously successful giant he was that in reading his life story one has to plead to God to give him a break. Yet, thank God that He didn't give Lincoln a break. It was Lincoln's failures that created a legacy of greatness of extreme worthiness and helped create the United States of America, a country that was not united and found itself in the middle of a great and tragic civil war in which brothers were killing brothers. It was a horrible time in American history, but if not for the strength, courage, wisdom, resolve and tenacity of Abraham Lincoln, it might never have become united. Thank God for failures!

The more substantive failures from which we learn, however, are our own. Why? Because we feel them more, often painfully, and when things hurt on a personal level, we're far more apt to take action and correct the mistakes than if the failures were someone else's.

True story. This one addresses *the greatest fight I ever lost*, a fight whose failures had enormous positive impact on the fighting curriculum of the Karate Institute of America and the Kiado-Ryu system of marital

arts, a fight whose outcome is so vivid I can clearly remember it to this day, decades after the event. It is also a fight I thank God I lost, not won, and which underscores the fact that *the road to success is paved with failure*.

The fight took place at a karate tournament in the mid 1980s. In preparation for the tournament, I had been working on new movement theories which incorporated an array of directional and angular changes, jukes, stutters, rollouts and motion nuances. As the fight began, I began applying these new theories. I was scoring on my opponent well and often, or so I thought. When I would score a point in my mind, the head official would deny it. He did this time and time again. I became frustrated. I calculated the final score to be six to two in my favor. A post review of the video by a highly respected black belt confirmed the fight should have ended in a six/two win for me. But in reality, and because of the subjective nature of competitive martial arts point fighting in those days, I ended up losing the fight three to two, and am I glad I did!

From an official standpoint, the fight was tied two to two with seconds left on the clock. I was circling my opponent in a counter clockwise direction when Bam!, I got clocked with a left backfist to my face, thus giving my opponent an ultimate three to two win. Of course in the moment I was upset until the final judgment was delivered by the referee at the center of the ring. When he announced my opponent as the winner, my opponent exploded in a screaming vertical leap, landing in a low squat position, pounding his chest with his fists . . . still screaming . . . and exulting in his victory. It was an awesome display of emotion. Although I had officially lost the fight, all I could do was contain my own joy, laughter and composure because my opponent was, by his overt and hyperbolic enthusiasm, telling me that the movement theories I was applying were working! He had become so frustrated in trying to hit me and not being able to do so during the contest as much as he would have liked, that after the fight his emotions got the better of him. He was ecstatic outwardly; I was ecstatic inwardly. Had this man not been so externally demonstrative, I never would have known that the movement theories I had been employing and working diligently to create and improve were working! To this day I am grateful for not only having lost that fight but for this man telegraphing his emotions. His actions confirmed the theories of fighting movement I had been developing, thus encouraging me to keep developing them.

Losing this fight was a great failure. Had I succeeded, I never would have had a clue that what I was doing was working. I would have simply basked in the ephemeral limelight and glory of the moment, patted myself on the back and gone on, not the wiser for what really happened.

There was more to that contest that underscored why it was *the greatest fight I ever lost*. Besides cementing the movement theories, when he hit me with that backfist in the final seconds to officially win the match - and it was a good shot, it taught me that my guard was ineffective and weak, causing me to

reconstruct it in such a way that a newly designed guard structure was practically impenetrable. Had I not taken that shot to my face, I never would have developed the more efficient and protective guard that resulted in many victories. This was a great second boon to having failed.

From this second failure, a new cardinal fighting sin emerged: "Never get hit with a backfist." To be hit and scored upon with this weapon meant one of two things: 1. the guard was weak and incorrectly structured, which we've discussed, and 2. I was too close to my opponent. Had I kept my distance, he wouldn't have been able to score on me. This later realization caused me to readjust my understanding of fighting distance. These *failures* resulted in dynamic changes to our Kiado-Ryu fighting curriculum which is superior to that which it had been but which would never have come into existence had I succeeded in winning that particular fight. It was a great moment, but it was a moment that most people would regard as one of *failure*, not success. The irony, of course, is that it was a great success because it ignited a whole new restructuring of Kiado-Ryu fighting theory. It was, indeed, a perfect example of how *the road to success is paved with failure*.

The moral of the story: don't be afraid to fail! Learn from your mistakes, be grateful for them and move on, allowing your own failures to pave the way to your successes.

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